

They are talking about reserving \$20 billion for Medicare. In the chairman's mark they describe a reserve fund for Medicare:

Whenever the Committee on Ways and Means of the House or the Finance Committee reports a bill or an amendment or a conference report that implements the structural Medicare reform—

In other words, nothing is available for prescription drugs without comprehensive Medicare reform. I am all for Medicare reform. But I do not know why we ought to hold a good, effective prescription drug benefit program hostage until we get comprehensive Medicare reform. This is what the program requires.

Then it says:

and improves the solvency of the Medicare Program without the use of transfers or new subsidies from the general fund.

Therefore it prohibits any use of any of the surplus at a time where we have an important and significant surplus projection. The surplus should be used to assist the Medicare program in a modest way. They prohibit any use of that surplus. It also requires and ensures additional reimbursement for Medicare providers. So we have to have a comprehensive reform of the Medicare system and we have to also have the major changes for Medicare providers before we can ever come to consider the \$20 billion that is going to be recommended as possible funds that could be used for a prescription drug program. This is half of what the President of the United States has asked for, half of his \$40 million request.

This is what it says. Under the budget:

Prescription drug benefit. The adjustments made pursuant to the prescription drug benefit may be made to address the cost of prescription drugs.

It is optional. It is optional. I do not think that is what the seniors or the American people—not just seniors, but all Americans are really interested in. They want us to take action and they want us to take action now. They do not want to set up an arbitrary barricade for us before we can take action.

I do not understand why our Budget Committee is effectively binding the Senate of the United States and prohibiting it from being able to take action on a prescription drug benefit this year unless it goes through the hoops which they have established in the committee. Even if you were able to get through all those hoops, it provides woefully inadequate funding over the next 5 years.

Last year the Budget Committee had \$100 billion over 10 years for Medicare, although in reality that money was not dedicated solely to Medicare and Medicare prescription drug coverage. Yet this year they are talking about \$20 billion over 5 years. The problem has gotten worse, not better. As we have seen, even though they had their pro-

gram last year and said they are really all for prescription drug coverage, they do not have any program.

That is a very unsatisfactory way to proceed when we are talking about one of the central concerns for not only seniors but also for their families. Seniors do the best they can. So often, when the parents are unable to pay, the burden falls on other family members to chip in and help pay for mom or dad's necessary prescription drugs.

The fact is, when the Medicare system was adopted in 1965, it was to be universal in nature and have the confidence of the American people. It was a pledge to the American people—if they worked hard and played by the rules, when they retired these seniors who fought in this country's wars would be free from the dangers of absolute financial ruin due solely to their health.

We passed Social Security to provide for them to live with some sense of dignity, and Medicare was passed to give assurance that they would be able to live their golden years in with the peace, security, and dignity in knowing their health care would be covered.

At that time, only 3 percent of all private health insurance programs had a prescription benefit, so the Medicare system did not put in a prescription drug benefit. Now almost every private employer-based health plan—99 percent of them—have a prescription drug benefit. But not Medicare. This is a serious coverage gap that exists, and every senior citizen has to be concerned about this gap in coverage. It demands action.

We can develop a program this year with our current circumstances, with the economic benefits under the existing surplus. We can enact a benefit package now that can benefit seniors. We ought to pass it this year. Sure, we can phase it in, we can build it up, but we want it now. Not like the Budget Committee saying maybe sometime off in the future and giving us absolutely no assurance. That is a mistake. That is flawed policy. That is, I think, a completely inadequate response to the challenges our seniors face.

Next week, when we debate the budget, we will have the opportunity to address this issue. I hope the overwhelming majority of the Members will support an effort that will come from our side, from our leaders to commit this body to take action and take it now. We will have a chance to vote on that. It ought to be something to which every senior citizen in this country pays attention. We will make every effort to fashion a program to provide assistance to our seniors. We are committed to that. We will not be discouraged from that opportunity by these budget recommendations.

#### PRESIDENT HOSNI MUBARAK

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I see my friend and colleague, the good Senator from Delaware; but behind him, I see someone for whom I have great admiration, who I join in welcoming back to the United States, a dear friend to me and one of the great world leaders of our time. He is a real voice for peace in the Middle East.

I know I will not trespass on the privileges of the Chair and the ranking minority by mentioning his name, but I want him to know what a pleasure it is to see him here.

#### VISIT TO THE SENATE BY THE PRESIDENT OF EGYPT, HOSNI MUBARAK

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, it is my honor to present to the Senate the longtime friend of most Senators, the Honorable President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak.

#### RECESS

Mr. HELMS. I ask unanimous consent we stand in recess for 7 minutes.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 11:52 a.m., recessed until 12 noon; whereupon, the Senate reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. BURNS).

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for as much time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TRANSPORT OF VIOLENT OFFENDERS

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I intend to introduce some legislation dealing with violent crime. Before I describe that legislation, I want to speak briefly about another piece of legislation that I previously introduced called Jeanna's bill, named after an 11-year-old girl from Fargo, ND, who was brutally murdered some while ago. I will speak about that for a moment today because something has happened in the last couple of days of which we ought to be aware.

This is a picture of a man named Kyle Bell. He is a child killer. He molested children. He was sent to prison for 30 years. He was eventually convicted of killing Jeanna North from Fargo, ND, and sent off to prison.

As is too often the case in this country, Kyle Bell was remanded to the custody of a private company to transport him to a prison in some other part of America. That private transport company lost this child killer along the way. He escaped. He was not wearing red clothing or an orange jumpsuit that said: "I am a prisoner." He was in civilian clothes. He was in a van with other prisoners.

One of the guards of the company that was transporting him apparently went in to buy a hamburger or something at a gasoline stop, and the other was asleep in the van. Kyle Bell somehow got his shackles off, climbed up through the roof of the van, and was gone. Tragically, the guards did not notice they had lost a convicted child killer for 9 hours—9 hours.

It concerned me when I saw what had happened to this child killer. This newspaper piece describes what happened and the manhunt around the country for Kyle Bell, a very violent career criminal.

I put together a piece of legislation and was joined by Senator ASHCROFT, Senator LEAHY, and others, to say that if state and local authorities are going to contract with a private company to haul convicted killers and violent offenders, at least the company ought to have to meet some basic standards. That is just common sense to me. It is not now the case.

Any retired law enforcement officer and their brother-in-law and cousin can buy a van, show up at a prison someplace and say: We are hired to haul your prisoners. In fact, it has happened all too often. I will give an example.

A husband and wife team showed up at an Iowa State prison to transport six inmates, five of them convicted murderers. The warden looked at the husband and wife team and said: You have to be kidding me. But the prisoners were given to the husband and wife to transport, and, of course, they escaped. There is story after story of this same circumstance.

The reason I mention it today is earlier this week in Chula Vista, CA, convicted murderer James Prestridge was being transported. He is a person convicted of murder and sentenced to life without parole. He was apparently, according to the Los Angeles Times, being transported from Nevada to North Dakota where he was going to be incarcerated under some kind of prisoner exchange. This is a convicted killer, to be incarcerated for the rest of his life.

Guess what. Mr. James Prestridge, a convicted killer, is no longer in custody. The private company called Extradition International lost him. He escaped. They stopped at a bathroom and he overpowered a guard. He went back to the van, overpowered the other guard, and this guy was gone. He and another violent offender who was with him are on the loose today.

Why is this happening? It does not happen when the U.S. Marshal Service transports violent offenders around the country. They are not losing violent offenders. But private companies have no standards to meet, none at all. Hire a couple of people, rent a van, get your brother-in-law, and you are in business. Some States will turn convicted murderers over to you to be transported to another part of the country.

This makes no sense to me at all. Convicted killers are being transported around our country without the precaution one would expect in the transport of violent offenders. Under these circumstances, the American people are not safe.

Again, the bill I have introduced will require any private company that transports a violent offender to meet basic standards established by the Department of Justice. That bill needs to be heard. We have asked for a hearing before the Judiciary Committee. It has bipartisan support. Congress needs to pass this legislation this year.

The escape in Chula Vista, CA, of a convicted murderer is just one more example of many escapes from private prisoner transport companies. I could stand here for 20 minutes and describe the escapes that have occurred with private companies having access to violent offenders. That is not in the public interest.

In my judgment, violent offenders probably ought to be transported only by law enforcement. But if some States decide they are going to contract with private companies to transport violent offenders around this country, then those companies ought to have to meet basic standards—standards on how you shackle a violent prisoner, standards on what that violent prisoner shall wear when being transported, standards on the experience and the training of the guards and the kind of equipment that is used.

But those standards do not exist now. There is none. That is why people, such as James Prestridge, a convicted murderer, are on the loose. Let's hope no one else loses their life because of this kind of incompetence.

(The remarks of Mr. DORGAN and Mr. DURBIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 2317 and S. 2318 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

#### BUDGET RESOLUTION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I came to the floor to address an issue which is pending before the Senate today, and that is the decision to write a budget resolution for the next fiscal year, a blueprint for our spending.

Just a little over a week ago, Billy Crystal, the comedian, did the Oscars presentation show, the Academy Awards. He was referring to a movie called "The Sixth Sense," where there was a little boy who had some supernatural power to see dead people. Billy Crystal, in one of the best jokes of the evening, said: I see dead people all the time. I watch C-SPAN.

Of course, it was a joke at our expense, serving in the Congress. But it must be true for a lot of people that when they tune in and listen to our debates and, of course, watch the committee deliberations, they have to won-

der: Isn't it more exciting? Don't these people do something that might be more entertaining?

It may not hit a high entertainment level, but I think the debate currently underway on the budget resolution is exciting in terms of spelling out America's priorities for its future because in a room just a block or two away from here, there will be a decision made on spending for America that can literally affect every family in the country. It is an important decision.

Part of that decision comes down to the major issue in the Presidential campaign. Governor George W. Bush, who appears to be the likely candidate on the Republican side, has made the cornerstone of his campaign a massive tax cut. In my estimation, it is a very risky tax cut. He believes the surplus we are generating now, because of a strong economy and a decision to cut back on the deficit, should go into a massive tax cut.

On the other side of the equation, President Clinton and Vice President GORE believe, as I do, that is foolish and reckless and it could endanger the economic growth we have seen over the last 7 years. Don't just take our word for it. Our colleague, Republican Senator JOHN MCCAIN, a candidate in that same Republican Presidential primary, said of George W. Bush's tax cut that it was not the thing to do; it was, in fact, bad policy. He said it more artfully, but that was his conclusion.

Chairman Alan Greenspan—no partisan, a man who has led the Federal Reserve and helped this economy to develop and prosper—has said it is the wrong thing to do.

The George W. Bush tax cut approach really overlooks the most important thing, which is debt reduction in America. Two-thirds of the American people agree with Mr. Greenspan, Senator MCCAIN, and the Democratic Party, that we should take our surplus and dedicate it to debt reduction, strengthening Social Security and Medicare, have targeted tax cuts—limited, but targeted where they are really needed—and then spend money on health care and education for the families across America.

Well, the Budget Committee is now debating this. In an hour or two, when I return there as a member, I will allow my colleagues on the committee an opportunity to decide whether or not they want to vote for the George W. Bush tax cut or they believe there is a better way. Now it may put some of my Republican colleagues on the spot. But politics is about choices. We make choices every day in the well when we cast votes, when we announce whether we are for or against a bill or whether we will sponsor it or vote for it. My colleagues on the Budget Committee will have a choice.

I think, frankly, they ought to reflect for a moment on some realities.